

Galatians 5: 22; “The Believer’s Goodness”, Message # 47 in the series – “Christ has Set us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 28th, 2024, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

I am sure that you have met people or known people who you would call good people. They are people who truly cared about you and thought about you in a good way. They tried to teach you to live your life in a righteous way. They did all that they could, to help you in your times of need and difficulty. Truly we can say that God placed these people in your life so that you would know Him better. It is important for each of us to see that this is what God would have us to become as well, in relation to other people around us.

The importance of this study cannot be underestimated when we realize that true goodness is one of the fruit of the Spirit. You cannot become a truly good person without grace changing you and Christ helping you. And therefore, I would like to show you 1st of all from the Bible, that people are not essentially good in their nature before conversion to Christ. That, really, it is only God who is essentially good in His nature. And 2nd – That it is Christ’s grace imparted to your soul as a Christian that is transforming you into a truly good person.

1st of all – Let us see from the Bible that people are not essentially good in their nature before conversion to Christ; that it is only God who is essentially good in His nature.

Turn with me over to Romans chapter 3, verses 9-12. Paul has asked before in verse 1 if there is any advantage to being a Jew? He says that there was much in every way. Because to them was committed the oracles of God; the Scriptures. Here in verse 9, he says: “What then?” “Are we better than they?” “Not at all.” “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.” “As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.” “They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.”

This is indeed a scathing condemnation of all humanity; that there is not one person who does good; no not one. This verse is saying even though there was a great advantage to having the Scriptures, that this did not make any individual Jew good in themselves. In fact, every single person who has ever lived, or who will live, with the exception of Jesus Christ, is a sinner. One of the foremost definitions of sin that we find in these verses is that people by nature do not do good. Doing good to, and for other people, is one of the primary aspects of godliness. The word that we are focusing our attention upon, in the Greek, is ἀγαθωσύνη (agathosune).

Joseph Benson defines this as: “A benevolent and beneficent disposition, with all that is kind, soft, winning, and tender, either in temper or behavior.” J.P. Lange says that it is – “active, ‘goodness’ or ‘beneficence’ as an energetic principle.” Matthew Poole says that goodness is: “a disposition in us to hurt none, but to do all the good we can to all.” Matthew Henry says that goodness is – “kindness or beneficence which shows itself in a readiness to do good to all as we have opportunity.” These words, “benevolence” and “beneficence” may be words which you are not too familiar with, as they are not used much, by people any more.

So let me define them for you. The word, “benevolence”, according to Webster’s 1828 Dictionary is taken from the Latin – “benevolentia”, from “bene” which means “well”, and volo, to will or wish. It means – 1st, “the disposition to do good; to show good will or kindness. It is to be charitable. The love of mankind is accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness. The benevolence of God is one of His moral attributes. It is that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings. We can truly say that being good and doing good are essential to God.

And it is out of His Attribute of Goodness, that we behold His love in the gospel to all of Mankind. And by believing His word we come to understand His special and particular love to

His elect people whom He has chosen to eternal life. “God is love.” 1st John 4: 7 and 8 says – “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Beneficence is “the practice of doing good; active goodness, kindness, or charity.”

But the truth of the matter is, that goodness is not found in any person by nature. We are not born good people. Where then does it come from, then, in persons who are moral but unsaved? It comes from a combination of God’s common grace and the development of a selfish morality. People are shown much common grace by God and sometimes they selfishly see the benefit of it. Their parents may have been good people who taught them the truths of what is right and wrong according to the Bible, and they taught them the advantages of good behavior.

They may have also taken them to a church where they were wrongly taught that a person could obtain eternal life through their humanly doing the good things that they do. I mean regularly going to church, being baptized, taking the sacraments, and trying to do good to help other people in need. Turn with me over to Matthew 19, verses 16-22. Here we have an example of what I am talking about. “Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’” “So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good?’” “No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

“He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’” “Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” “The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’” “What do I still lack?” “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’” “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Notice that this man was interested in obtaining eternal life, but he thought that he was good enough to obtain it without being born again. He thought that he could obtain it by his own efforts. He thought that he could obtain it by his trying to be good, like Jesus was good. He thought that he could do this without being converted to Christ, and without being changed in his heart. He came to Jesus, he thought, as one good person seeking the counsel of another good person. He thought that He and Jesus were on the same level as good men, and that Jesus could help him either to know that he had eternal life, or how he could obtain it by his own good deeds.

He was simply seeking Jesus’ approval of the goodness that he had already cultivated selfishly. So he comes to Jesus thinking that he has the power to do whatever good things that he needed to do, so that he could obtain eternal life. He thinks that he can be saved by his good works. He said to Jesus, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” And Jesus says to him, “Why do you call Me good?” “No one is good but One, that is God.” Now, some people have misunderstood what Jesus was doing here in saying this to this man. They think that Jesus was implying that He was not personally perfectly good.

But we know from many other places in the Scripture that Jesus was sinless and perfect in everything that He did. 2nd Corinthians 5: 21 – “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” But actually Jesus was challenging this man’s calling Him good so that he himself would be able to confess that he (the rich young ruler) was not essentially good in Himself. Jesus would have him to agree with Him and to confess that only God was essentially good in Himself. And, if he only knew it, the man who was standing in front of Him was God made manifest in the flesh.

Jesus did not tell the man that He was God made manifest in the flesh, but he wanted to convey this knowledge to this man who so desperately needed it, that nothing that he could do would obtain for him eternal life. Jesus follows these statements up with preaching to him the covenant of works at the end of verse 17. “But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Now

you will notice that He doesn't preach the gospel to him and say to him directly – "You must believe in Me to have eternal life". The reason was, that this man still believed that he was good enough, as he was, to be able to obtain eternal life. Dear reader, do you believe this of yourself? Jesus was still keeping this man to the covenant of works to see if he really believed that he could keep the commandments of God perfectly.

You are not really ready to hear the gospel and receive the gift of eternal life, until you are able to realize that you cannot keep God's commandments perfectly; that you are a sinner. Well, having heard this, the man responded to Him by saying in verse 18, "Which ones?" And so, Jesus gave him all the commands of the 2nd table of the law, all of the duties required of one man to another man, except the 10th commandment, "You shall not covet". And then he further tells him that he must also have kept the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Notice what the young man said to Jesus in verse 20 – "All these things I have kept from my youth." "What do I still lack?"

And Jesus said to him in verse 21 – "If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me." Jesus keeps him to the covenant of works in all of this, but He also gives the man the key to his being able to do all of these good things: believing His word, and following Him. If he wants to be perfect, he must keep perfectly the 10th commandment, "You shall not covet". Now Jesus had not mentioned this directly before. But He was intimating to this young man that this was where he was lacking. The young man told Jesus in all sincerity, that he had kept all the commandments which Jesus mentioned from his youth up.

In Mark's gospel it says: "Then Jesus looking at him loved him." The Lord Jesus knew that humanly speaking his motives and his intentions were good, but He also knew that they were selfish. The Lord Jesus knew that he had not, to that very day, kept the 10th commandment. And Jesus also knew that he was very desirous to hold on to all of his possessions, and that he had not really come to terms with helping people who were in need. Jesus also knew that he was not as desirous as he should have been in giving to the poor. And further, Jesus knew that he did not really believe that there would be a reward for him, if he did give away and sell all of what he had and give it to the poor.

Jesus plainly set it before him, that either he would follow Him and have heavenly treasure or he would hold on covetously to what he had accumulated for himself. This young man did not comprehend the greatness of what Jesus was offering to him, which is called here – "treasure in heaven". He did not understand the beauty and the glory of spiritual things. He did not understand that there were precious and eternal spiritual realities and blessings which awaited him if he would believe Jesus' words to him.

But he must understand that God alone could give him the grace which would truly satisfy his soul, and lead him to become a truly good man. He thought to himself: If this is perfection, I do not want it. And verse 22 tells us – "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." The right conclusion that we should come to is that there is that there is no one who is good except God alone, and that Jesus Christ is God. And God through Jesus Christ is well able to provide for you and to give you everything that you need, both for life and godliness.

Turn with me over to Luke 12, verses 29-34. "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind." "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things." "But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys." "For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also."

2nd – Let us understand that it is Christ’s grace imparted to your soul, as a Christian, that is transforming you into a truly good person.

Turn with me over to 2nd Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 3 and 4. “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.” Notice here that the faith of the Christian is designed by God to grow, and the love which we have for one another as Christians is meant to abound towards each other. This takes grace being imparted to our souls. This is how goodness is built.

In verses 5-10 Paul goes on to talk about how God will pay back those who were persecuting them, with righteous judgment on the Day in which Christ returns. On that same Day, Paul says, the Lord Jesus will be admired by all those who believe, because their testimony, the testimony of the word of God being preached to them, and to us here tonight, was believed. Then in verses 11 and 12 he says this: “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let me close by asking this: Do you pray for other Christians that God would count them worthy of His holy calling of them? Will you pray that they would fulfill the good pleasure of His goodness, and that they would experience the work of faith with power in their lives to become better people? This will prove us to be good people if we will do that very thing. If you yourself have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only perfectly good man, then by the power of His grace, you will pray and strive to become more and more like Him.